

## [Old Haystack Was a Grizzly]

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NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview 10

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 West 12th St. New York City

DATE January 19, 1939

SUBJECT "OLD HAYSTACK WAS A GRIZZLY"... AN UNCLE STEVE ROBERTSON  
STORY

1. Date and time of interview 1/14/39
2. Place of interview
3. Name and address of informant Harry Reece (Daca) 63 Washington Sq. So. N. Y. C.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

(See previous interviews)

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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SUBJECT "OLD HAYSTACK WAS A GRIZZLY"

My Uncle Steve Robertson who was a Pioneer pioneer with a great deal of experience in the Far West in the very early days indeed, often remarked that "...any danged man who tells a bear story, or I-Gawd, for-that matter a fish story, is danged nigh sure to be a cussed 'xeggerater that stretches th' truth till she snaps and flies back and hits him in his darned face, and I-gosh, that's something that jest ain't fit to be endured— I mean a damned 'xeggerater!"

But on one occasion my Uncle Steve yielded to temptation and told about "Old Haystack" and "Old Haystack" was a bear.

We were hunting deer in the Black Lake country up in the Seven Devils mountains of Western [Idaho?], and one evening after supper I suggested to Uncle Steve that it would give me a lot of pleasure to shoot a bear or two while we were up there in the high hills.

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Uncle Steve looked at me with the sort of pitying expression that Pioneers of the Far West of the early days often look at young men who have not had very much experience as “pioneers” and told me about “Old Haystack”....

I-Gawd, I figger it depends a hell of a lot on what kind of bear you shoot—and what you shoot him with—whether or not there's any “pleasure” in shootin' him,” Uncle Steve said.

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Probably it wouldn't be so damned much pleasure to shoot a bear like, well, hell, like “Old Haystack” was, for instance. Old Haystack was a grizzly and Bob and me called him “Old Haystack” ‘cause he was as big as a darned haystack—although mebbe, to be plumb truthful an' accurate, they might be some haystacks biggeR'n he was, but damned if us pioneers had any haystacks that was any bigger. Actually it wusn't Bob or me that named him “Old Haystack”, but it was Mam—she was Bob's wife—that named him that.

Mam looked out of the winder one day jest as Bob and me was sittin' down to dinner when we was livin' down in Salubria Valley and she yelled to Bob and me: “Bob, you and Steve come here quick an' look over yonder across th' river... a cussed grizzly bear as big as a doggone haystack is carryin' off that two-year old heifer of “Old Blossom's” that we was figgerin' on havin' for a new cow— Fer God's sake, Steve—Bob—git yer guns an' do somethin!”

I-Gaud, Mam was right. There was th' biggest grizzly that ever lived, I reckon, draggin' off that six-or-seven-hundred pound heifer jest like a hound dog would pack a rabbit it's caught.

“Gawd-a-might!” Bob, yelled, “they ain't no gun big enough to kill a bear that size—leastwise, no gun littler than a damned cannon an' we ain't got no cannons around here, so I reckon we'll jest have to let him go!”

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So that's what we done. We jest let him go that time.

But that was jest th' start. "Old Haystack" had found out where to git meat cheap an' easy and in three or four days he showed up again and that time he got a mule—it was "Old Yaller", th' same one that was hit by the gila monster oncet and was still a little stiff in his leg that was bit...but a damned grizzly that's big enough to drag off a mule, even one that's been bit by a gila monster, has got to be a hell of a big grizzly as anybody that knows 3 anything about mules and grizzlies ought to know without bein' told.

Then, I-Gawd, before long he showed up again and got another two-year old, but it was a steer that time and not a heifer.

By that time Mam was gittin' pretty darned impatient and wouldn't hardly let Bob or me neither have a minute's peace but kept naggin' us to "fer God's sake do somethin' before that cussed grizzly got tire of mule and beef meat and carried her or Bob or some of us off!"

Well, Bob and me finally talked it over 'n' Bob said: "Steve, I'll be damned if I know what to do about Old Haystack. You know cussed well that even my old Sharp's 45-120 wouldn't even make a impression on him— Hell, no, it wouldn't make any more impression on him that it would on a cussed elephant, and your Springfield wouldn't neither—so what th' hell we goin' to do about it? You'll have to figger out something, Steve, that's all they is to it," Bob said.

That's th' way us Pioneers always had to do, some one or other of us always had to jest figger things like Old Haystack an' how to git rid of him out, and me bein' the best figgerer I always had to do it for Bob and Mam and me. But I went to work on it and I figgered an' figgered until I didn't hardly sleep at nights, jest tryin' to figger out what to do about Old Haystack 'cause I knowed if he kept on comin' he'd finally git tired of mules and calves and

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so forth and was jest as apt x as not to git Bob or Mam or me some night— for by then he was gittin' so he'd come around at night as well as in the day time.

I knowed damned well that jest shootin' him wouldn't do much good— probably jest make him mad for a little while but it couldn't possibly kill him. So, I didn't know what th' hell to do. But I finally realized that if I could jest figger out some scheme to make it damned uncomfortable when he come around that neighborhood maybe he'd git disgusted and quit comin' around there.

So that's what I was doin' one night after Bob an' Mam had gone to bed and I was settin' there by th' fireplace, danged near gittin' th' headache worryin' 4 about how th' hell I could make that damned grizzly so uncomfortable th' next time he come around that he wouldn't want to come around any more. All of a sudden I happened to glance up at the mantle over the fireplace and saw a half-gallon fruit jar danged near full of carpet tacks Mam had brung out from Arkansas when we'd migrated out west—thinkin' that some day maybe she could make a rag carpet, an' if she did, she'd have the tacks handy to tack it down with...

I-Gawd, them tacks was my inspiration!

I figgered that no damned bear had ever been shot with carpet tacks— and if one was shot with them he'd be so surprised and so cussed uncomfortable that it would probably distust him with the neighborhood where he was shot with 'em, and more'n likely he'd stay away from that neighborhood after that...

So, that's what I done, I-Gawd. I jest poured about a pound and a half of powder into my old muzzle-loadin' shot gun and then dumped danged nigh that whole half gallon jar of carpet tacks in on top of it...tamped them down an' set there waitin'. I figgered it wasn't any use wakin' Mam and Bob up to tell 'em what I was plannin' on doin', an' if I done it they'd wake up anyhow when th' old gun went off.

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Well, I set there for about a hour—mebbe to be plumb accurate it was a hour an' a half—but anyhow about that long, an' I-Gawd, th' first thing I knowed I heard Old Haystack trompin' around out there by the corral where th' cows was kept....he was figgerin' on beef that night, I reckon.

So I slipped out an' it was a moonlight night and shore enough there he was about twenty yards from th' house, jest startin' to yank a couple of poles off th' corral so he could go in an' git a heifer or maybe even a cow... That was all I wanted to see. I jest poked that old muzzle-loadin' shot gun that was about half full of carpet tacks in his direction an' pulled th' trigger...

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That was the worst surprised damned grizzly bear anybody ever saw! Them tacks jest tacked his cussed hide right down on his belly before he knowed what hit him—an' they must have been uncomfortable as hell for he let out a roar that waked Bob and Mam and scared hell out of the mules and cows, and then he started on a gallop for some place else—runnin' his damndest, and that's the last we ever saw of Old Haystack... So that's the way it was. And as far as I know, I-Gawd, he's still runnin' and never will stop...

Yeah, us Pioneers in the Far West in the early days shore as hell had lots of things to figger out—but somehow or other we always managed to dot it....

My Uncle Steve Robertson was very careful to be accurate in his yarns and 'despised anybody that 'xeggerated — which anybody was almost certain to do if they told bear stories—so perhaps that's why "Old Haystack" wasthe only bear story he ever told to me."